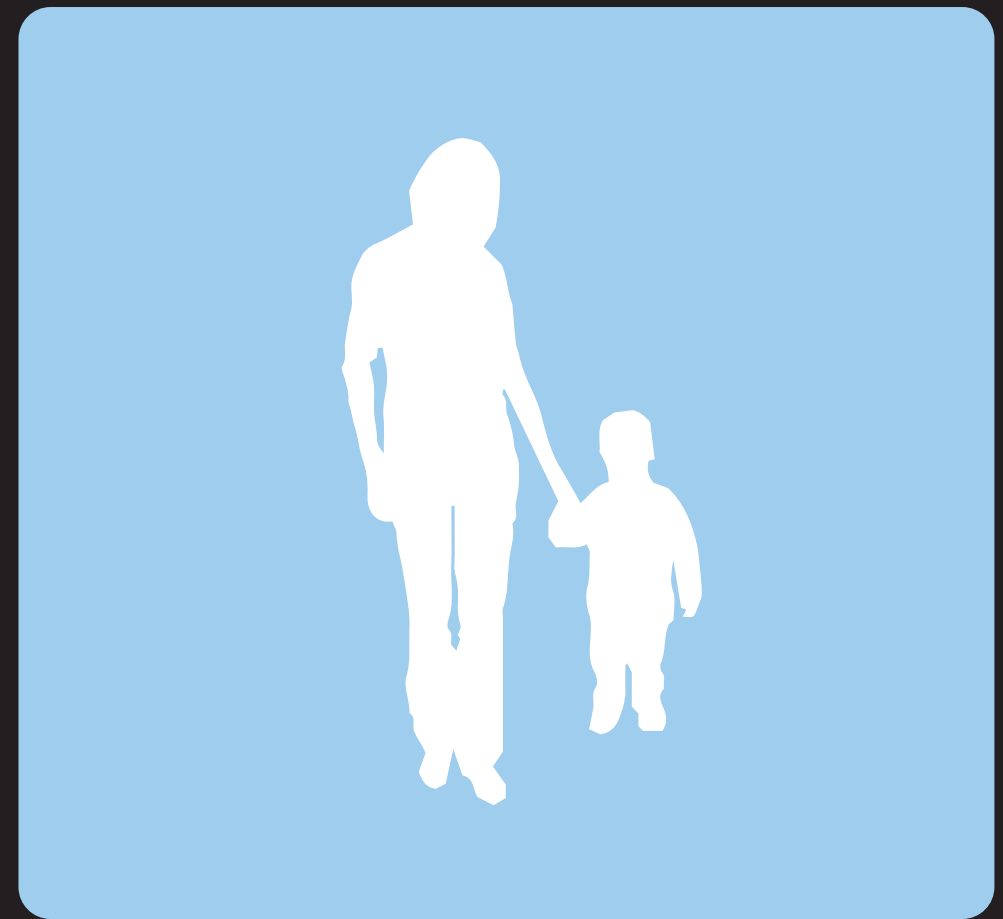


multi-generational family



nuclear family



single parent family



Nuclear Armageddon?

Cady Guyton

Matrix 2

Sustainability Problems | 2014

Traditionally understood in sociology and anthropology as “a group of people who are united by ties of partnership and parenthood and consisting of a pair of adults and their socially recognized children” (*Britannica*), the historical origin of the nuclear family has been a topic of debate. Human origins indicate multi-generational family households (particularly during hunter-gatherer lifestyles), southern Europe seemed to carry that notion through history until the industrial revolution. However, according to *family-studies.org*, “The nuclear family was the dominant arrangement in England stretching back to the thirteenth century.” Recent studies have shown both that close-knit nuclear households seem to be the secret recipe for success for the children being raised, and that these nuclear families (as previously defined) are on the decline.

The industrial revolution is sighted as the proliferant for the nuclear family as it drew (usually) the male into the urban environment for jobs and industry, unraveling the multi-generational rural fabric of whole families living together and tending the land. However, as the nuclear family took rise, studies began to reveal that, for unknown reasons, children that grew up in this kind of environment were generally more successful, more likely to pursue higher education, more likely to persevere, and ultimately more likely to have nuclear families of their own in which they raised children. “...if we follow the logic of Berger’s history...the children of married couples are internalizing their parents’ bourgeois aspirations and child-centeredness...” (*family-studies.org*) This has developed into two new phenomena within the nuclear family parenting style: the “concerted cultivation” parent, and the helicopter parent.

To categorize “The Nuclear Family” within three realms of sustainability (social, ecological, and cultural) it is not immediately apparent if the nuclear family has become a sustainability problem within the modern world. Human history, the evolution towards, and the general longevity of, the Nuclear Family would suggest that it is socially sustainable. “Extended and clan families under the control of an older generation would be less adaptive since grandparents were more likely to bring up baby the old-fashioned way;” As these sorts of households became less beneficial, social structure adapted and formulated a nuclear norm.

Studies and trends however show that society is in more recent times leaning towards single family homes, arguable a sort of de-evolution of the nuclear family. This manifestation reflects that the children of this type of household are less “likely to develop ‘soft skills’ like self-control and perseverance that are more crucial than ever to school and labor-market success. Some of this could be chalked up to the logistical problems faced by a single parent.” (*family-studies.org*) While the reason behind that success may be—like the skills the children are lacking—soft, the data is hard numbers that reflect an increase in single families that have never married, and increase in divorce rate, and the mutual resultant of single parents homes; not for nothing, casually coined as a “broken-home.” Thus, with culture constantly evolving, and the existence of the nuclear family in decline, has it become culturally unsustainable under today’s societal parameters?

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*Emily Baybay is a "breaking news/multimedia producer for philly.com." She uses almost exclusively the digital realm as her medium. She has worked in various social media applications and was the digital news editor for the Washington Examiner. She has a degree in history from the University of Pennsylvania. Her article "Census: Big decline in nuclear family" analyzes 2013 census data to mine out information on the nuclear family, as it exists in America, and how that data has changed from 1970 to 2013. She breaks the analysis into several main categories: Fewer family households, more people living alone, decline in the nuclear family, later marriages, smaller families, fewer children, and parents not marrying, to name a few.

"In 1970, 40 percent of households were married couples with children. Such households made up just 19 percent of homes in 2013."

"Of children living with only a mother, 48 percent had a mother who had never been married in 2013, up from 7 percent in 1970."

"In 2013, 27 percent of households were one-person households, up from 17 percent in 1970."

** Ernest Callenbach was an American author, active in the 1970s and published much later in his life. He was also a film critic, editor, and self-proclaimed "simple living adherent." His work *Ecotopia* is a fictional novella that speculates on the more liberal portions of the United States seceding and founding their own ecologically sustainable utopian nation, called Ecotopia. Three quotes to assess the Ecotopian vision of the nuclear family include:

*** Kay Hymowitz is an American born writer with a bachelors from Brandeis University and a masters from Tufts University. She now teaches at Brooklyn College and the Parsons School of Design. She was the 2010 William E. Simon fellow at the Manhattan Institute and has written for the Wall Street Journal. The main argument of the article is to discuss the topic of the Nuclear Family. Hymowitz mentions the historic origins of the

nuclear family as a social structure; she then discusses the interesting proven facts of increased success and resilience of children raised in two parent households compared two children raised by a single parent. Hymowitz is careful to stress that while this is documented, the reasoning behind it is unknown.

"...before the industrial revolution, the extended family was the norm in the western world...The nuclear family, it was believed, was evidence of family decline."

"Researchers find that children growing up with two married parents are more likely to develop 'soft-skills' like self-control and perserverance that are more crucial than ever to school and labor market success. Some of this could be chalked up to the logistical problems faced by a single parent."

"Their parenting style can be described as 'concerted cultivation': they devote great time and attention to developing their children's skills. Single parents tend to be younger, less-educated, and more inclined to believe in the child's 'natural growth'..."